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ABSTRACT

Over 10 years, the researchers studied community-based organizations (CBO) for young people, eventually examining the work of approximately 120 youth-based organizations in 34 different cities. A look at these organizations and the young people they serve shows that CBOs offer a means of reaching at-risk youth, and that they can have a significant impact on the skills, attitudes, and experiences of young people. Surveys of CBO participants show that they express a sense of personal value, hopefulness, and agency far greater than peers in their communities, and even greater than the attitudes of youth growing up in more representative U.S. circumstances. Follow-up studies with more than 60 participants in youth CBOs show that the majority of these young people are firmly set on positive pathways as workers, parents, and community members. Research reveals that effective CBOs are intentional learning environments. CBOs cannot be effective, however, without support from community members and other community organizations. Long-term and short-term strategies to promote involvement in CBOs are outlined. (SLD)

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Community Counts

HOW YOUTH
ORGANIZATIONS
MATTER FOR YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT

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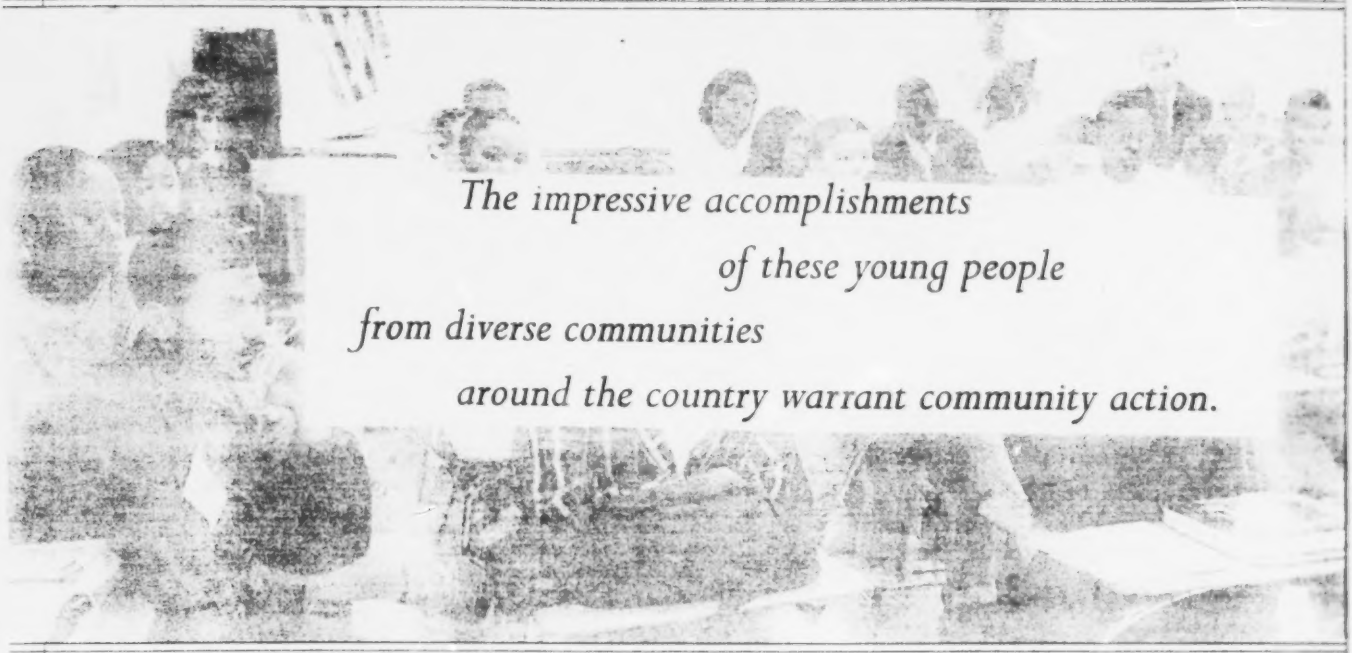
BY MILBREY W. MCLAUGHLIN

THIS REPORT IS DEDICATED TO JOHN W. GARDNER,
WHO HAS NURTURED THIS WORK FROM ITS BEGINNING.
HIS LEADERSHIP AND VISION INSPIRE COMMUNITIES
TO COUNT FOR ALL OF THEIR CHILDREN AND YOUTH.

Communities and their youth seem to be growing apart just at a time when they need to be pulling together. Troubling signs are everywhere that youth of all descriptions—not just so-called disadvantaged youth—find insufficient supports in their communities to be able to move confidently and safely toward adulthood. Many schools lock up tightly at 3 p.m., sending children and youth into empty houses, barren neighborhoods, street corners, or malls. Youth interpret a local landscape void of engaging things for them to do as adult indifference. For instance, when we asked one youth how his midwestern community sees him, he replied, "They don't. I feel invisible." We heard a version of this assessment from youth everywhere. But in a number of communities nationwide, adults are working to develop and sustain youth organizations that provide youth placement and opportunity, breathing new life into their communities as a result.



The impressive accomplishments of these young people from diverse communities around the country warrant community action.

Interviewer	What's it like to grow up in this community?
Youth	It's boring, boring, boring! There's nothing to do and nowhere to go.
Interviewer	How do you see kids in this community?
Police officer	Kids are different today. They have no respect. They don't want to work hard.

Most adults are familiar with some version of teenagers' complaints of boredom. In some cases, such complaints reflect little more than an adolescent's contrarian cast of mind. But for many, if not most, of America's youth, this assessment of the dearth of interesting things to do in their community reflects reality. And, in the absence of organized activities and inviting youth-focused places, young people make haphazard choices for themselves.

Many teachers, law enforcement officers, social service workers, and other adults believe that today's youth are different from yesterday's. They are widely perceived to be less engaged, less motivated, and more likely to get into trouble.

Have kids changed, or has the society changed? Well, both. Communities have changed, families have been transformed, and workplace demands are fundamentally different from what they were a quarter of a century ago. Because families, friends, communities, and religious or civic groups no longer assume primary responsibility for making connections, a gap forms in society's supports for its youth.

Youth lose out. Young people with nothing to do during out-of-school hours miss valuable chances for growth and development. During the most critical years for moral development, these youth miss opportunities to find satisfaction in work for the good of their community. Society loses out when youth fall through the cracks in institutions that could prepare them for a productive future. Community counts—for better or worse—in its response to these institutional gaps and youth's unmet needs for support, care, and opportunities for healthy development.

The odds are high that a young person growing up in one of the county's troubled urban communities will do poorly in school. For example, in some urban centers, up to 60% of African-American boys will not graduate at all.[1] The odds are high that a young person growing up in one of America's struggling rural communities will move onto welfare rolls, rather than into productive employment. The odds are high that youth with nothing positive to do and nowhere to go will find things to do and places to go that negatively influence their development and futures.

This institutional discontinuity exists for young people of all social backgrounds. Even in well-to-do suburban communities, many youth find themselves adrift.

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Some youth are lucky enough to have someone who can pay for fee-for-service activities and shuttle them back and forth. Other youth are fortunate enough to live in a community with sufficient engaging, worthwhile activities in the afternoons, on weekends, or during the stretch of summer months.

But for too many youth, the odds seemed stacked against hopeful futures when their communities offer few resources for them. For the majority, there are no adults around for sustained active learning opportunities during their nonschool hours. Moreover, many communities lack supervised, educational places to go when school is out. In one community we came to know, youth noted with irony that the only public facility open in their community was the county jail. In another urban community, the neighborhood was so barren and dangerous that, said one youth, "even the pizza man won't deliver." Young women growing up in urban neighborhoods like this one told us that they stay inside locked apartments after school for fear of violence on the streets. Young women in some midwestern towns did not feel much more secure. In response to our question about what advice she would give a newcomer to her midwestern town, one said: "Don't trust anybody. Don't talk to anyone. Mind your own business. Be careful."

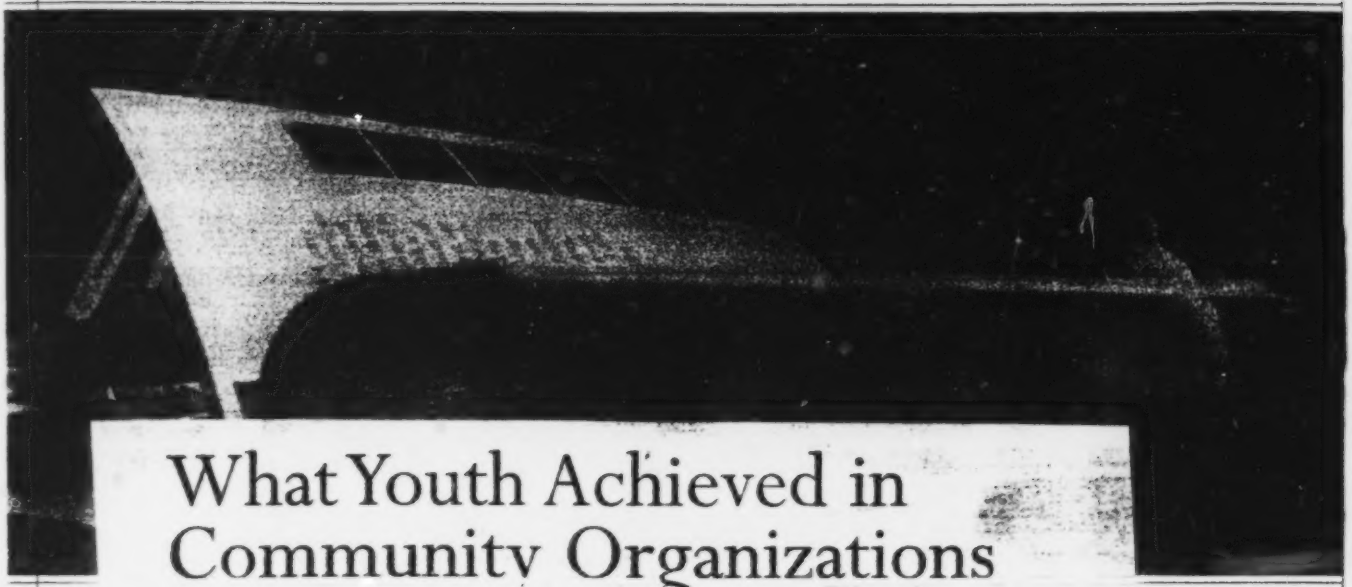
Community organizations can make a powerful, positive difference in youth's lives. A decade of research looking into the contributions of community youth-based organizations in challenging settings provides evidence that community—in the form of the organizations and activities it supports—can help youth beat the odds associated with gaps in traditional institutional resources.[2] In our ten years of research, this research team has come to know the rhythms and work of approximately 120 youth-based organizations in 34 different cities, from Massachusetts to Hawaii, that constructively involve young people in their nonschool hours.

We wanted to learn about "effective" community based-organizations, and relied on youth to define those terms. They led us to diverse organizations they identified as good places to spend their time.[3] These organizations engage young people in challenging but fun things to do, offer a safe haven from often dangerous streets, and provide ways to spend free time in ways that contribute significantly to their learning and their social development. In this way, these organizations, in youth's views, were not "typical" of the other organized opportunities that may also be available in their communities—activities youth judged as uninteresting, not appropriate for them, or otherwise off-putting.

Neither are the youth we came to know in these community-based organizations (CBOs) "typical" American youth, either in terms of the schools they attend, the communities they inhabit, or their family circumstances. We found in these CBOs engaged youth who are typically hard to reach, designated "high risk," and often most isolated from community. Almost without exception, the urban youth we got to know came from low-income, high-risk family and neighborhood settings. Young people we met in these mid-sized towns were typically of lower-middle or lower class and, like their urban counterparts, they came from families struggling with unemployment and social disruption. The rural youth who participated in our research were generally from poor families and wrestled with the unique aspects of their rural communities.

Our research reports numerous accomplishments and successes of active young people engaged in community organizations. Of greatest importance for society is the compelling evidence from the experiences of these youth that CBOs can play a critical role in meeting the needs of today's young people. They can fill the gap left by families and schools that are stretched to capacity to provide supports to young people. One of the most appealing aspects of these CBOs is that they give young people the opportunity to engage in positive activities, to develop close and caring relationships, and to find value in themselves—even in the face of personal disruption, poor schools, and neighborhoods generally devoid of supports.

The impressive accomplishments of these young people from diverse communities around the country warrant community action. Community-based organizations offer a means for reaching youth and they can have a significant impact on the skills, attitudes, and experiences youth need to take their places as confident, contributing adults.



What Youth Achieved in Community Organizations

Youth participating in these CBOs accomplish more than many in society would expect of them and, in fact, more than most citizens would ever think possible. Their achievements and triumphs are of many different kinds—formal and informal, social and academic. Each of these achievements matters to youth's journey through adolescence to the futures they can contemplate and claim.

Academic success—in terms of high school graduation, participation in rigorous courses, and good grades—plays a major part in a young person's ability to land a satisfying job, or even find employment at all. Even in today's economy, paths to all but the most menial jobs are closed without a high school diploma.

But a measure of academic success alone is not enough to motivate youth to tackle challenges, succeed on the job, or effectively navigate the institutions of mainstream society. Young people need life skills as well. Those skills and attitudes include a sense of personal worth, a positive assessment of the future, and the knowledge of how to plan for it. They also include attitudes of persistence, reflection, responsibility, and reliability. Self-confidence and a sense of efficacy are critical if youth are to strive for success in school and society.

Enhancing these life skills, in addition to supporting more traditional academic outcomes, is at the center of the youth organizations we studied. Many of these organizations, besides benefiting young people, also have a positive long-term effect on the community. The young people express high levels of civic engagement and a commitment to getting involved. They intend to be assets to their communities and examples for others to follow.

ACADEMICS

To the majority of the youth we met in effective community organizations, their local schools fall short both as learning institutions and as places where they feel safe and valued. Compared to most American youth, the youth in this study are more likely to experience violence in their schools, to encounter drugs, to have something stolen from them, and to feel personally threatened at school.[4]

Yet, compared to American youth generally, young people who participate in the community organizations we came to know achieve at higher levels and hold higher expectations for their academic careers. For example, youth participating in the community-based organizations we studied are:

- 26% more likely to report having received recognition for good grades than are American youth generally, and youth with high levels of participation (several days a week or some) are *more than two times* more likely to report recognition for good grades
- nearly 20% more likely to rate their chances of graduating from high school as "very high"
- 20% more likely to rate the likelihood of their going to college as "very high."

In other words, despite the challenges they face at school, in their neighborhoods, and often at home, teens who participate in the CBOs we studied generally achieve more in school than typical American youth. Further, higher levels of participation in community-based organizations are associated with greater likelihood of academic success.

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SELF-CONFIDENCE AND OPTIMISM

Cynicism about the future is a commonplace attitude among youth in communities where local job markets are unstable, where the institutions intended to support their development are of poor quality or lacking altogether, or where there is little to suggest that they could do other than collect unemployment or settle for a dead-end job. The youth we studied stood out even in the most distressed settings by expressing hope for their futures and talking animatedly about their plans.

Significant numbers of the youth not only had positive ideas about what the future would hold, but they also had gained the knowledge and confidence to plan and reach for it. In contrast to the self-destructive assessments of many other youth from difficult environments—who say things like "the future be dead" or doubt the value of trying to succeed because it's "no use"—young people engaged in CBOs hold markedly different views from their peers, and even from typical American youth.

Youth participating in these CBOs say that they expect to have a job they will enjoy, that they can do things as well as others, and that plans they make will work out. Compared to the typical American youth, young people participating in community-based organizations are:

- significantly more likely to report feeling good about themselves;
- significantly more likely to indicate higher levels of self-efficacy;
- 8% more likely to "strongly agree" that they are persons of worth. More notable, those with high levels of participation in CBOs are nearly 15% more likely to view themselves as worthy persons;
- significantly more likely to report higher levels of personal agency and effectiveness. For example, they are significantly more likely to "strongly disagree" with the statement that "chance and luck" are "very important" to getting ahead;
- nearly 13% more likely to feel that the chance they would have a job that they enjoyed was "very high."

Youth who participated in these CBOs, in other words, express a sense of personal value, hopefulness, and agency far greater than peers in their community, and greater even than youth growing up in more representative American circumstances. These youth generally feel proud of what they can do and believe they can construct a positive life.

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

These youth generally feel they want to "give back" to their communities, moreover, that it is their responsibility to do so. In contrast to youth alienated from their community, these youth acknowledge the important role that community, in the form of their CBO, played in enabling their positive development, and they intend to help provide the same opportunities for other young people. For the majority of the youth in our study, community service has become a habit—one they expect to keep throughout their lives.

Youth active in the community-based organizations involved in our research are significantly more likely than typical American youth to believe that it is important to do community volunteer work. For example, compared to American youth generally, youth participating in these CBOs are more than two and a half times more likely to think it is "very important" to do community service or to volunteer. Youth work to make youth-friendly and safe communities.

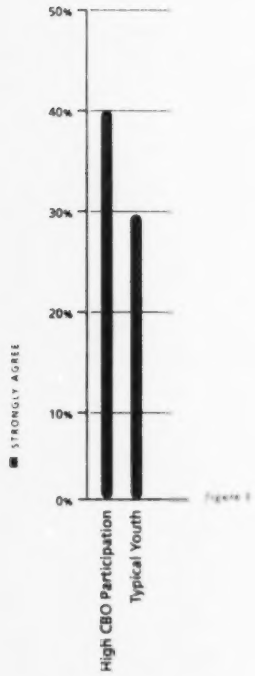
In particular, youth active in community organizations expect to work to "correct economic inequalities" or to make life better for children and youth growing up in their communities. Especially in urban areas, where most of the young men in our study have been or are still involved with gangs, this commitment to enabling a different, safer path for children, youth, and families finds passionate expression. In fact, this commitment to bettering their community is the reason why many urban youth say they intend to stay in their community and make it better, rather than move away.

These attitudes of civic responsibility and benefits of community service are most apparent in those organizations that feature community service as its focus or as an important aspect of another activity. Youth who have high levels of participation in community service activities—as part of arts programs, sports, leadership initiatives, dedicated community service projects such as "Weed and Seed," work with elderly residents, or rehabilitation efforts—are *eight times* more likely to respond that it is very important to get involved with community than were representative American youth.

Youth active in community service clearly derive benefits that magnified those associated with participation in a CBO. They bask in the praise of neighbors who appreciate their clean-up activities, bright murals, or inviting community gardens. This was the first time many of these youth have received positive feedback from adults. In fact, many told us it was the first time they felt valued by their community and that this regard fueled their self-confidence and optimism about the future. These youth provided detailed descriptions of the ways they grew personally as a result of their involvement in community service activities. They stressed how their experience changed their attitudes about personal responsibility. One said, for example,

> It gives me a sense of responsibility, like what you've got to be [when you have a job]. ... You've got to be there on time, work hard at it, and get done what needs to get done. That's why I am part of this [program] because I needed that responsibility.

SENSE OF EFFICACY
"I AM ABLE TO DO THINGS AS WELL AS OTHERS"



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Such comments about personal gains from community service are strong and find consistent support in survey responses. Youth with high levels of participation in community service activities are nearly twice as likely to "strongly agree" that they feel positively about themselves. Those with high levels of participation in community service are nearly two and a half times more likely to "strongly disagree" that they lack enough control over their lives. In consequential ways, the benefits of community service go in both directions—to the community that receives it and to the youth who provide it.

PATH TO SUCCESS

We have maintained contact with nearly 60 of the youth who were part of our original research in three urban communities. We have had a chance to examine how they fared over a decade. Contrary to predictions that they would be "dead or in jail" before they left adolescence, the great majority of these young men and women, now in their 20s, are firmly set on positive pathways as workers, parents, and community members. A few went on to higher education and are proud college graduates. Most got some kind of training after high school. With few exceptions, these young adults are employed and active members of their communities, giving back as they said they would. They own small businesses such as a sports park concession stand or carpet cleaning enterprise. They work in local park and recreation facilities. They are engaged parents. They often continue with the arts or sports activities that engaged them as teens.

Would these youth have made it anyway? Would they have accomplished all of these things without the community organization that nourished and challenged them in their free time? Little doubt exists in their minds that the CBOs where they spent time after school, on weekends, or in the summer months played a critical role in nurturing their development and in mediating the risk factors in their schools, neighborhoods, and often their families and peer groups. These effective community organizations, in the words of one urban youth worker, help youth "duck the bullet," or beat the odds of early pregnancies, futures lost to drugs, street violence, or derailed by school failures. These CBOs provide community sanctuaries and supports that enable youth to imagine positive paths and embark upon them. These community organizations are learning environments that boost the success of many youth in school, but just as important, teach youth many life skills—without which academic success would mean little. Without these community resources, they too could have faltered on their journey through adolescence.

Effective Youth Organizations Are Intentional Learning Environments

What kinds of CBOs enable these positive outcomes for youth? The community-based organizations associated with these successes differ in nearly every objective way possible. No one type of program, facility, or organizational affiliation was consistently associated with positive youth development. We found similar outcomes across a broad spectrum of type, location, and size of CBO. Adult leaders—both paid and volunteer—came from various personal and professional backgrounds. Some have been in the military service. Others have been teachers. Many have worked in church groups or with athletic teams all their lives. Funding for the organizations' activities came from a wide range of sources: national sponsoring organizations, block grants from local cities, federal job-training monies, regional foundations and local donors, youth fundraisers, and the pockets of adult leaders. Most of the organizations live a hand-to-mouth existence, with few resources in equipment and personnel. Given these differences, however, the CBOs are similar in several ways.

INTENTIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The quality and effectiveness of the community-based youth organizations we studied are not happenstance. In fact, these positive outcomes are not found in most youth organizations or in other organizations that look similar on paper. Too many community-based opportunities are "gym and swim" recreation centers, tutoring efforts, or drop-in centers set up primarily to "keep youth safe and off the streets." While many of these programs make an effort to provide young people with quality activities, others merely provide a place to go and a collection of things to do.

On a casual visit to a youth organization that attracts and sustains youth involvement, a visitor might sense its relaxed atmosphere and apparently informal relationships among youth and adults. However, the activities, environments, and relationships in the youth organizations where we found these positive outcomes for youth are deliberate, distinguishing them from casual drop-in centers in both the content of their activities and the environments adults create and insist upon.

DIMENSIONS OF A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

figure 2

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Community-based organizations with an emphasis on learning are alike in some critical ways. The core elements of an effective youth organization correspond directly to the core elements of an effective learning environment as described by learning theorists. As different as they may seem on the surface, the CBOs youth led us to are remarkably similar in their values and goals across different agents, spaces, settings, and activities. All are youth-centered, knowledge-centered, and assessment-centered.

Youth-Centered. The CBOs that enjoy the confidence, lovalty, and participation of youth put youth at the center. Adults hold the youth in their vision for the organization and the community. They know youth's interests and what they bring to the organization. They know about their lives at home, in school, and in the neighborhood. The CBO's programs reflect this youth-centered focus.

Respond to diverse talents, skills, interests. Adults make an ongoing effort to make activities both accessible and challenging for *all* youth. Effective youth organizations offer activities in ways that make them appropriate and inviting to youth with a diverse range of talents, interests, and skill levels. Adults take the time to suggest activities that are appropriate to diverse skill levels and break activities down into parts to allow youth with all skills to participate. For instance: A theater group brings in novice thespians as props managers, stage hands, wardrobe tenders, and other roles that allowed those beginners to watch, learn, and play a vital role in the organization. A sports team devotes special coaching to less-experienced athletes, and like the theater group, includes novices in the excitement of games as important supports for their team members. A literacy program that takes up most of a church's basement with newspaper production buzzes with activities from writing lead articles, to interviewing sources, to laying out pages. In each of these examples, there are multiple ways a young person can join in, regardless of skill level. Adults in effective CBOs pay close attention to what the youth can do and introduce them to engaging activities that challenge them to stretch their skills.

Build on strengths. Youth-centered programs identify and build on the youth's strengths. Programs do not aim to remedy weaknesses or deficiencies in youth before providing opportunities for leadership and risk-taking. Contrary to a "fix then teach" approach (that assumes youth cannot learn something new or engage in a positive activity until a problem has been remedied), these programs aim to identify what the youth do well already and develop those skills. Problem behaviors that may exist or concerns about school achievement are addressed within this positive context.

This positive approach contrasts with what youth encounter in many communities and their organizations. Many youth feel that adults do not care about them, do not acknowledge their needs or worth, and do not like them. "Everyone thinks of us as being bad," said a young person in rural America. "But it is not our fault." A police officer in a mid-sized town underscored his community's tendency to notice the negative, rather than build on the positive. "You have to be bad to be noticed—the 'good kid' doesn't get any attention." An urban social worker observed, "Youth in this community aren't valued, and they have few occasions to demonstrate their value." Effective youth organizations notice the strengths of young people and build on them.

Choose appropriate materials. Youth-centered organizations tailor their activities to the interests and strengths of the youth with whom they work. For example, leaders of Girls Inc. in the Southwest revised materials they received from the national office to connect with the Latinas in their organization. The leader of a Girl Scout troop carefully reviewed national programs and curricula from the perspective of her high-poverty girls. "It's easy to make assumptions," she said. "Many of our girls don't have alarm clocks or even telephones at home, so some of the things we get that assume such things in the home aren't appropriate for them."

Provide personal attention. Adults in effective youth organizations are contemptuous of what one called "herd programming," where youth move in large groups from activity to activity, with little personal attention or connection. This description unfortunately applies to many after-school efforts that provide a safe place for youth to gather at the end of the day but have insufficient resources to do any more than that.

Reach out. Youth-centered organizations actively reach out into the community to let youth know about their programs. Youth workers in effective CBOs do not simply put a notice in a newspaper and sit back to wait

DANCE 'TIL YOU DROP: TWO AFTER-SCHOOL DANCE LESSONS

David, the dance teacher, is about 30—he is tall, black, dreadlocked. "These are my babies," he tells us. "I was just like them. I come from the same place they come from." The small room buzzes with energy and body motion as dancers pour in, peel off their dark blue and white uniforms and throw on bright T-shirts and stretch pants. When David finally shuts the door, there are 18 dance students—all African American, nearly all girls. The three boys maneuver to the front and wiggle for attention. David moves nonstop and works up a dripping sweat. The group sails through an hour of stretching and shoulder popping, leg raises and sit-ups. A few dancers slip into dance moves they are familiar with, and David gently redirects them into the routine of the moment. He keeps them all in view, breaking his routine to squeeze a shoulder or reshape a pose. All eyes are focused intently on him until they coast to an exhausted but exhilarated halt. Ms. Velez dances professionally in the city's well-regarded dance troupe. She spends several afternoons a week teaching dance to inner-city African American youth. She has the intensity and high expectations of a professional, and she keeps her class focused and busy. Her directions are clear. She dances with the students, modeling steps, sequences, and style. The group splits in two upon invisible command, and facing each other, they move through a fast-paced, lively hip-hop style dance. After a set of tough moves, Ms. Velez stops the group. "That was better but you must give me—BOOM!" Her chest pops out and her back arches pretzel-like. Students take in the ferocious move. Soon they are "popping" for each other. All students wear kneepads because, as one student explains, "This is serious stuff!" The line of dancers gradually breaks until there are just youth moving in space. It's 3:30, and they've been dancing nonstop for 45 minutes. A girl looks winded. "Five more and then we'll get a drink of water—five, six, seven, eight. " Ms. Velez keeps them moving past the promised time, encouraging, "Let's take it from the top, and then we'll get a drink." The young dancers seem happy to do what she says. They have an important performance coming up.

—OBSERVATION NOTES

for youth to show up. They know that most youth do not read the newspaper. They understand that many youth might feel, on the basis of past experiences, that the program would not include activities that interested them. These adolescents are accustomed to programs in which they're treated as children, or that views them as a problem. Most of the effective organizations we came across actively reach out to draw youth in. Adults and participating youth seek out other young people to join. Not surprisingly, youth themselves are among the most effective ambassadors and recruiters for their organizations.

Feature youth leadership and voice. Youth voice and points of view help define youth-centered organizations. Youth provide leadership and direction, taking a central role in designing activities, establishing and enforcing formal and informal rules for members. In some organizations, each year begins with a process of members looking over last year's rules, throwing out unwanted ones and adding new ones. Youth input into rules adds legitimacy and salience to effective CBOs.

Knowledge-Centered. Community-based organizations that motivate youth and contribute to their development are knowledge-centered. They point to learning as a reason why youth should get involved, and they take steps to provide the relevant knowledge.

Clear focus. Having a clear program focus is vital to a knowledge-centered organization. Each of the effective organizations we examined is about something in particular. They are clearly and intensely about sports, arts, entrepreneurship, community service, or athletics. These central "topics" provide a common purpose and make it possible for the members to express their own emerging identities as artists, athletes, or young entrepreneurs. Club programs that appeal to youth similarly offer an assortment of focused, tightly organized activities that may vary according to the interests of youth, but typically include sports teams, community service, and something arts-related, such as teen drama. These efforts are not merely loosely organized activities to do with sports or arts or leadership that a young person can dip in and out of; they are concentrated programs that aim to deepen skills and competence through intense engagement in a specific area.

One generic activity will not fit all youth. Adolescents are clear about wanting to be part of an organization that sup-

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ports their individual interests. As anyone who has worked with a teenager understands, she wants to be just like everyone else, but she also wants to pick her own identity.

Quality content and instruction. Clear focus is not enough to hold on to youth, however, if they feel an activity lacks quality. Not every arts program, sports team, or leadership club is able to attract the interest of young people. Striking among the CBOs where youth spend time is their high evaluation of skill-building activities. Youth are the first to notice that good instruction motivates them. Exemplary teaching and committed teachers show all students they are learners of promise and a value to society. High-quality content and instruction propel youth to accomplishments beyond those they imagined possible.

Embedded curriculum. How that focused activity is conceived and carried out also matters enormously. We see youth in effective organizations almost always engaged in activities that deliberately teach a number of lessons. The adults within a successful CBO recognize the many kinds of knowledge and skills their youth need to succeed in school and life, and they deliberately try to provide them.

Embedded within the organization's programs are activities that build a range of academic competencies and life skills. Youth leaders take every opportunity to extend these skills. For example, an arts program asks youth to research their cultural history. Young painters learn a good deal of history, gain pride in their background, and gain skills in mural making. A dance teacher encourages her students to keep journals and often starts dance sessions by having students read their writings aloud. These dancers pick up habits of writing and reading while learning to hip-hop or double tap. Or in a project focused on child care in the community, youth read news articles on the topic and study various issues related to child care. They read in textbooks about "stages of play" and create write-ups based on their observations as classroom aides.

Even hard-driving sports organizations find ways to broaden the perspectives and competencies of youth. For example, it is common in many organizations for team members to come to practice early to work with volunteers on homework, study for exams, or fine-tune specialized units related to their sport. Many coaches work academics into topics of great interest to their young athletes, such as nutrition and weight training. One year a basketball team had six-week units of study on the following topics: finances of the National Basketball Association, physics in the sport of basketball, and neurophysiology.

LEARNING LIFE SKILLS THROUGH SPORTS

The Rockets is a winning inner-city basketball team made up of African-American youth from one of the city's most impoverished neighborhoods. The coach sees his goal as getting youth ready for life and uses basketball expressly to that end. Students are put in charge of coaching each team. In addition, the coach pays explicit attention to involving all students; better players pass to less skilled players even when they could have taken shots themselves. The coach and players work intensely on developing skills and executing plays. There is no referee—students must take responsibility for monitoring themselves. The post-game wrap-up focuses on questions of sportsmanship and personal growth. "Can anyone name something good another player did in practice?" the coach asks. "William passed a lot today," an eighth grader who was coaching replies. After discussing various players' performance, the program director says, "It's time for self-evaluation. Get ready with thumbs up or thumbs down." The director then states different criteria, and the participants evaluate themselves: "Controlling body and mouth?" Most youth put their thumbs up. A few put thumbs down. "Teamwork? Coachability?" the coach continues. Half the thumbs are up, the other half down. "Helping others?" One boy who has his thumb down mutters, "I didn't do anything to help someone today." Finally, the coach asks, "Outside of the gym, doing things to improve yourself?" Again, a mixed result. The young men take this reflective exercise as seriously as their passing drills and practice at the foul line.

—OBSERVATION NOTES

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LEARNING TO BE A LEADER

Darryl, coordinator of the high school mentor program, starts the session with a game. Students divide into groups of three and each team picks a leader. He whispers the rules of the game to the leaders, and tells them to return to their group. Groups get active, but after a short time Darryl stops everyone and reminds them that each leader was supposed to brief his or her team. The game starts over. Now some team members lose their ability to speak, others lose the use of their hands or their eyes. But the team has to communicate well enough to build a block tower together. Eventually the tallest tower wins, and Darryl "debriefs" the groups about their process. "What did it feel like to be a leader? What was it like working with someone who couldn't see? What made it easier to work as a team? Harder?" One student said, "Everyone can do a job and be important to the team." Another said, "It was easier when someone told us what to do." They talk about feelings. Someone said, "I felt all alone, like it was all on me." Another said, "I felt pressure." Darryl related the building game back to the group process, and the students' eventual work mentoring young students attending the after-school arts program classes. "Communicate with the artists and teachers if you are feeling pressure—ask them for help. You are joining a team." A student says, "I really didn't know I was feeling pressure when I was building. I just got really quiet and focused on what I was doing." The students are attentive and listen closely to Darryl, and to each other. At the end of the discussion the young people record in their journals what they learned that day about themselves and about leadership.

—OBSERVATION NOTES

Each of these units included original research, problem sets, discussions of ethics, and decision-making. For example, the unit on the NBA covered costs of health insurance, uniforms, travel, income from ticket sales, taxes on players' salaries, and using probability theory to illustrate the youngsters' chances of making it to the NBA. The neurophysiology unit discussed steroids, heart rate under exertion and under heat dehydration, and myths surrounding "chocolate highs" and "carbohydrate loading."

Just as important to the development, competence, and confidence of the youth, however, are the life skills woven into their activities. A basketball coach debriefs his team after every game on sportsmanship. Talk of personal responsibility and teamwork always come before talk about winning strategies. On the way home from performances, a gymnastics coach made a point of stopping for a restaurant meal "so the guys can learn some table manners." The director of a Boys and Girls Club instituted an annual formal dinner, complete with table service. The purpose of this evening was to introduce youth to social situations they will encounter and, as he put it, "to give the boys some models of how to treat young women—hold out their chairs, things like that."

Multiple "teachers." In knowledge-centered CBOs we found many adults acting as teachers. Senior citizens are there as teachers. Peers teach each other. Community members help out with homework, bring snacks, or coach teams. The most visible teachers we observed are those with formal teaching roles in the organization—the coaches, directors, consultants, organizers, and peer tutors, among others. But these leaders frequently identify other adults and youth within and outside the organization as advisors and mentors. Peers are particularly powerful teachers in high-quality youth organizations, and youth leaders know it. Accordingly, they provide different opportunities for youth to link with adult and peer teachers, selecting different "teachers" at different times.

Assessment-Centered. "How'd I do?" "How's this?" "What d'ya think?" Learning and development requires ongoing feedback. Assessment in such varied forms as coaches' comments, public performances, a teacher's gentle correction of a dance pose or mural technique, peer reviews, game outcomes, or self-reflection are constant in activities that challenge youth, stretch their skills and experience, and return benefits of pride and personal growth. In these youth-centered environments, evalua-

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tion is not about competition or one-upmanship. It is candid, supportive feedback on how a youth did and how she could do better next time.

Cycles of planning, practice, and performance. Because cycles of planning, practice, performance, and assessment characterize most of the effective youth organizations we studied, the activities found there are not of the "pick up" variety. While many club programs have opportunities for youth to stop by and shoot some pool, have a swim, or find a game on the basketball court, joining the club's basketball team commits youth to regular practices and games. Community service programs valued by youth also require careful planning, consistent involvement, and follow-through. One girls' club was concerned with medical services to the elderly. They studied costs and availability of services within nursing homes, assisted living programs, and the homes of people who received homebound care. They volunteered in nursing homes, made visits with residents in assisted living, and organized distribution of food and gifts to the homebound for the holidays. Throughout the activities, youth met with adults and peers to reflect on their experiences and devise new strategies for work with the elderly. Or, youth involved in an inner-city rehabilitation project designed and built a model home and had the thrill of seeing their plans, calculations, and decisions about construction and design standing proud in their neighborhood in the form of attractive housing.

Feedback and recognition. Organizations where youth accomplish at levels that make them and their community proud devise activities that culminate in celebration and performance. Adults find any number of ways to showcase the talents of their youth. Ms. Velez stages an annual dance recital to show off the accomplishments of her young dancers (see sidebar, p. 10). Moreover, says the coordinator of the dance program, the pride attached to that annual performance spills out into the community. She notes the special case of a homeless family whose, "mother comes to class and stands there beaming with pride because she's watching her daughter dance across the stage. That's why we're in this community."

Youth find feedback and pride of accomplishment in ways other than formal performances. A youth hard at work in an inner-city garden and park project said, for example:

> This is how you show responsibility, and for me, I'm doing something for the community which everybody gets to see. ... I can show people I'm doing it. ... They can just walk past and see me doing it. So that just builds up my self-esteem.

An arts organization sends its members to meet with the business community to negotiate a contract to paint murals in a corporate office. A YMCA dispatches young men affiliated with the gang prevention effort to meet with local politicians and present proposals for funding. A literacy effort assigns youth to solicit advertisements to support its community newspaper. Each of these assignments requires youth to plan what they will do and evaluate alternative strategies. Each provides immediate feedback on their choices and presentation of self.

These culminating events and public displays are more than important goals and rewards for youth. They also provide opportunities for youth and adults in their community to see each other in new ways. Such performances go a long way toward strengthening relationships among adults and youth in their neighborhoods.

As the interlocking rings in Figure 2 suggest (see p. 8), the elements of an effective community youth organization are mutually reinforcing. Because adults focus on youth, the knowledge they provide fits youth interests and needs as defined in local terms. Because adults assess youth's progress on an ongoing basis, they are able to tailor activities to stretch, but not intimidate youth. Continued assessment also lets adults know about the merits of their own program choices. Is the program engaging? Too hard? Too easy? A youth-centered environment must be flexible—responsive to changing tastes of youth and to changes in local labor markets, opportunities, and resources.

Effective youth organizations take a broad view of essential competencies. As they dance, balance the books, or rebound, youth acquire skills of leadership, organization, problem-solving, and persistence. Young people working in their community or lobbying for support for their organizations learn political skills and

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valuable lessons about how to move through, and with, the "system." As their peers, youth leaders, and the public assess their products and performances, youth come to understand that quality evolves, and they learn about the importance of revision, attention to detail, and pride of effort.

The social processes of reflection and evaluation teach youth about alternative explanations of outcomes and how to deal with them in constructive ways. They learn how to move beyond stereotypes, for example, rather than launching into heated debate. Under the watchful eye of the adults in these organizations, youth learn elements of social etiquette. They learn how to present themselves to the community and employers, both in person and on paper. Given meaningful roles in their organizations, youth learn about trust, responsibility, and personal accountability. They learn that their actions and their inactions matter. They acquire a critical sense of agency and realism. They learn that they can make important contributions to their group and their community. They learn they can accomplish socially valued goals. And they form assessments of their future and how to reach for it. This sort of learning about self, community, and futures occurs through action.

Essential to this learning, however, is the presence of an accepting community within the organization. Supportive, caring community is the essential element of an effective youth organization.

Caring Community. High-quality youth organizations are first or second families for many participating youth. For some youth, these CBOs serve as a primary source of relationships and support. The youth organizations provide

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN
SCHOOL AND AFTER-SCHOOL SETTINGS

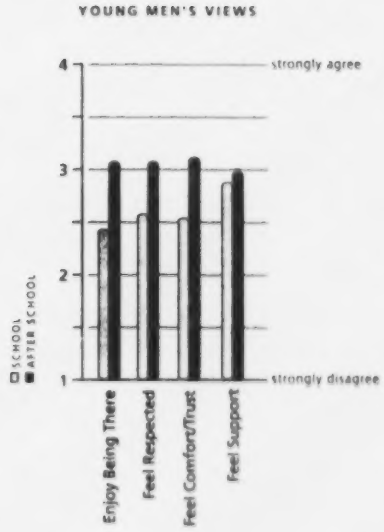

figure 3.1

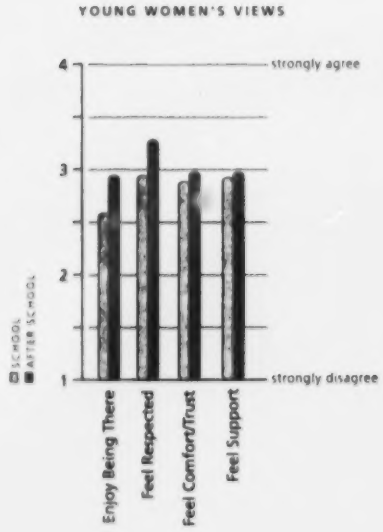

figure 3.2

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"family-like environments"—environments that provide many of the supports that, ideally, a family would.

Safety. Youth feel safe in these organizations. Urban youth, especially, put security at the top of the list of requirements for a community-based youth organization they would attend with confidence. Adult leaders of the urban youth organizations we studied understand that the "boundaries" most significant to their members are not census tracks or attendance areas but gang boundaries. They take special care to ensure the safety of their members. One obtained a van with tinted glass to transport their youth the three blocks across so-called "Death Wish Park." Another established clear rules about hours of attendance for rival gang members in the same neighborhood. As a result of this close attention to safety, many youth report feeling safer and more respected in the "family" of their youth organization than they do in school.

Trusting relationships. Effective CBOs where youth congregate provide more than a safe haven, however. They focus on building relationships among youth, adults, and the broader community.

Many youth in these organizations talk about the sense of unconditional support they find in the organization and how this sense of belonging fostered the trust and confidence they needed to accept new challenges. Youth contrast their experience in these youth organizations with other experiences where they felt they were being treated as problems that needed remedy. Youth growing up in the harsh corridors of urban communities are particularly adamant in stressing the importance of being taken—without judgment—as they are and helped to move on to more positive places. Effective community organizations for youth focus on building relationships and undergird those relationships with unqualified acceptance.

Clear rules. However, the conditions of unqualified acceptance themselves are qualified. Features of safety, trust, and acceptance are supported by a number of clear rules and responsibilities. An essential set of agreements and understandings involves the rules of membership. Many facilities make it known that no gang colors, weapons, drugs, foul language, or alcohol may come through the door. Almost all of the effective youth organizations we studied set clear expectations for members' attendance and participation at meetings, practices, or other group sessions. Several athletic groups have specific rules as well as strict expectations. If a player stops going to school, he cannot play. Missing two practices means the bench for the next game. Not showing up in uniform means the bench plus push-ups. Youth were adamant about having and enforcing such rules. For example, a basketball coach had a lot of explaining to do when he called a benched player into the game against a tough opponent. The coach reasoned, wrongly, that the team would consider winning the game more important than sticking to rules. As they told him in angry recriminations after the game, "rules are rules" and even if it meant a loss, they should be applied consistently.

Other critical rules involve expectations for how members treat each other. "Nothing negative." Members are expected to be supportive, fair, and keep close watch on the safety of the group. In groups with a span of ages, youth care for, mentor, work with, and induct younger members into the organization just as older sisters and brothers might.

We noticed other things about the rules at work in an effective youth-based organization. They are, in youth's assessment, fair and key to the sense of trust and safety they felt there. The rules are youth-centered in their flexible application. We were stunned, for example, to watch the coach of a baseball team quietly retrieve a youth's mitt from the train tracks, where it had been hurled in a silent rage and in direct affront of the club's rules about equipment. In response to our unasked question about rules, the coach told us about a night of particular violence in the young man's home, how the youth needed to, "get it out. ...We'll talk about it later."

Responsibilities for the organization. Youth also have responsibilities of place. Everyone picks up, shares, and takes responsibility at high-quality CBOs. One adult leader explained how he wanted to keep a home-like atmosphere going that depended on members actively thinking of the youth facility as a place where they belonged. "This is their house. There are no 'Boys' and 'Girls' signs on the bathroom doors here any more than there would be at home. They should know or ask. They should treat this place like their own house. ... Keep it clean and know that what they do will determine to a great extent how people see us. If their house is a pig pen, then that's how people are going to perceive us." Part of this responsibility involves taking care of the group's

equipment. Young people in these community organizations are in charge of everything from the team's basketballs, to expensive audio equipment, to the club van, to the scrapbooks that chronicle an organization's performances.

Likewise, CBOs that attract and keep youth engage them in the day-to-day realities of operating the organization. For example, youth often have to raise extra money and help decide how to spend the group's regular budget. Athletic organizations playing teams outside their neighborhood hand over travel plans to older team members. These members decide mode, route, departure times, pick-up arrangements, and spending money. The responsibilities themselves teach youth important lessons about leadership, responsibility, trust, and decision-making. Beyond that, stronger engagement in running the youth organization means more intensive ties to the group. Shared problem-solving builds community.

Constant access. As in the ideal family, adults provide caring, consistent, and dependable supports for youth and are available as needed. In reality this usually means that these adult staff open their lives to youth and are available to them anytime. In the youth organizations we studied, we found blurred boundaries between adults' professional and personal lives. Organizations with facilities provide access to adults and spaces to meet daily and often in the evenings and on weekends. In many of these places, youth come and go at all hours. Many youth simply come to the youth organization after school, curl up on the floor or worn furniture, do homework, talk with friends, and wait for rehearsals or practice to begin. Some come to work on special projects connected with a show or product development.

For those groups with no facilities, adults usually hold other jobs and meet with the young people only several times each week, usually when borrowed space is available or when the weather allows meeting in an open field or at a park. Nonetheless, these adults make themselves accessible to youth by giving out their work and home phone numbers and being available outside the formal activities of the youth organization. One coach of a winning inner-city basketball team has to schedule formal meetings of the team around his job as a high school social studies teacher. But hardly a day goes by that he does not have contact with a team member—some of whom regularly camp out in his apartment when the going gets too tough at home.

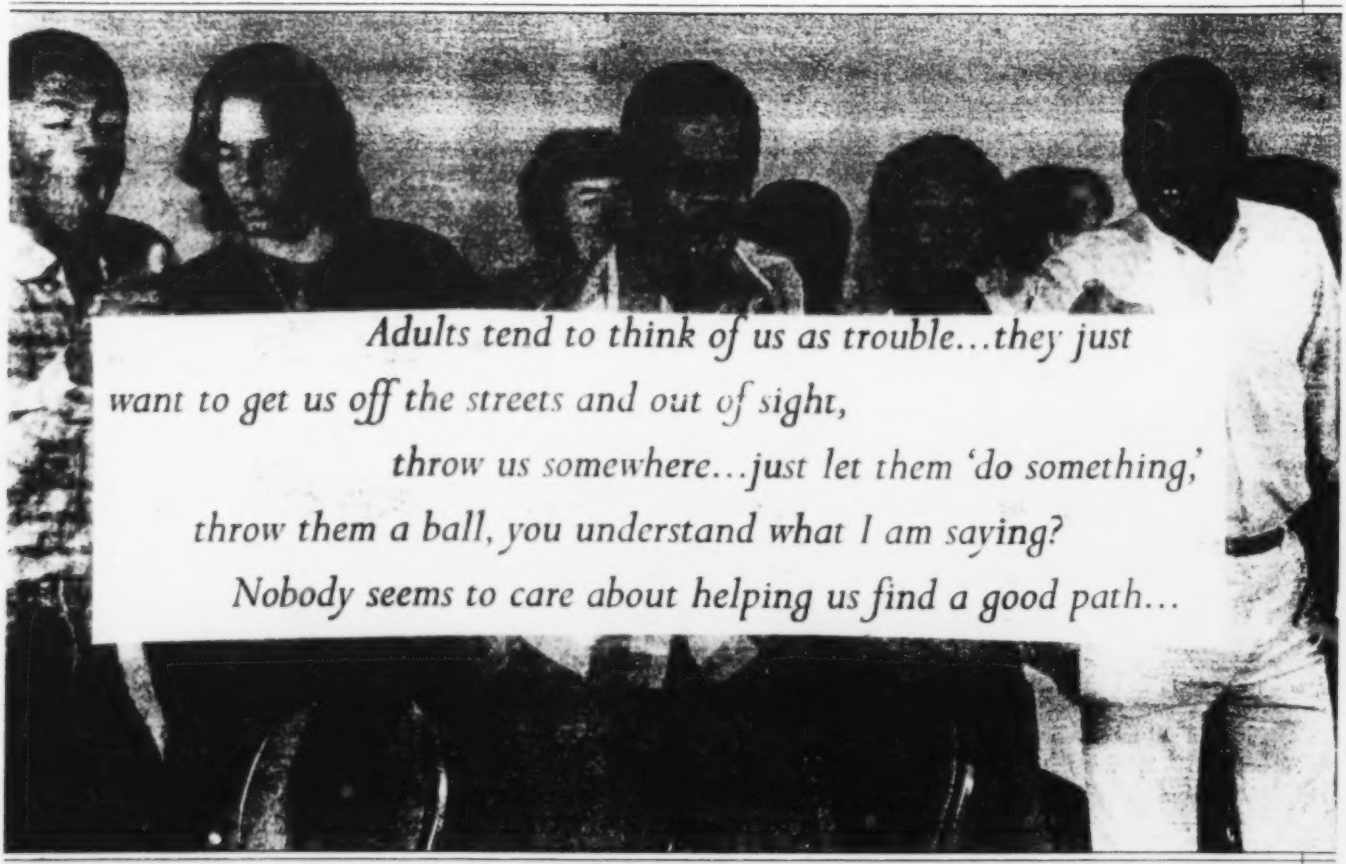
A common finding of research into the resilience of youth at risk—and one that the policy community knows but keeps rediscovering—is the crucial role of one adult in enabling a young person to manage the treacherous terrain of dysfunctional neighborhoods and families, inadequate institutional supports, and peers headed in negative directions. Our research adds another voice to that refrain. A caring adult can make all the difference in the life of a youth. Thus, effective youth organizations pay particular attention to sustaining connections with youth.

Social capital. Effective CBOs also build relationships among youth, their community, and society—they provide youth social capital in such forms as introductions to community leaders, tips on jobs, meetings with local businesspeople, and contacts in policy and service systems. Adults in these youth organizations work with youth on job applications, call friends to set up interviews, and arrange transportation. Youth in a number of organizations shadow adults to learn more about their work and to establish personal relationships with someone outside the immediate community. Effective community organizations provide particular relational resources that foster links across an otherwise often-unbridgeable gulf between youth and society's institutions.

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate significant differences in how youth see the environments of school and their youth organization (see p. 14). These differences are particularly significant for African-American adolescents, who often experience school as a hostile environment and their neighborhood streets as dangerous. Effective youth organizations involving African-American males seem to provide an especially valuable and rare resource for their development and safe passage through adolescence in urban America.

> Adults tend to think of us as trouble...they just want to get us off the streets and out of sight, throw us somewhere...just let them 'do something,' throw them a ball, you understand what I am saying? Nobody seems to give a shit about what would help us find a good path...

These youth organizations where young people imagine, plan, and achieve care deeply about the quality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Nobody seems to care about helping us find a good path...

of opportunities for youth. For reasons of fiscal and organizational capacity, or conceptualization, these organizations are the exception in their communities and around the country. Youth led us to programs and organizations they considered "best." The social, academic, and civic outcomes we found within those organizations celebrate their many tastes.

Waiting lists also tell of the special features of these youth organizations. Most of the effective organizations in this study are overflowing, with waiting lists of eager youth. Some of the small groups—such as those featuring sports, the arts, or a leadership initiative—have applicants numbering more than two times their available slots. Perhaps the most dramatic was the high-demand, high-performance urban tumbling team that reports a waiting list of 3000 young people. However, in these same communities, other youth organizations go empty and resources unused because young people assess their programs as uninspired and their settings impersonal. They head instead for the streets or empty homes. Youth will not migrate to just any organization. Content matters.

Anyone who has worked extensively with young people knows that no one answer can respond to all questions, and no one program will meet the needs of those between the ages of 8 and 18. Yet some principles of design are evident. The community organizations that encourage and enable these positive outcomes are environments deliberately created to engage youth in ambitious tasks, to stretch their skills, experiences, and imaginations. The work of an effective youth organization is neither easy nor merely just for fun. These organizations are communities of learning and care, aimed at enriching the individuals—youth and adults—who belong to them.

Community-based organizations of the kind we describe here may be the institution of last resort for youth in depleted inner-city environments—where failure is perceived as insurmountable and young people feel paralyzed by their lack of belief in themselves. Youth organizations can provide bridges to other paths and opportunities to find self-value and success. In all communities, youth-based organizations that create engaging learning environments for young people comprise critical resources for youth in out-of-school hours.

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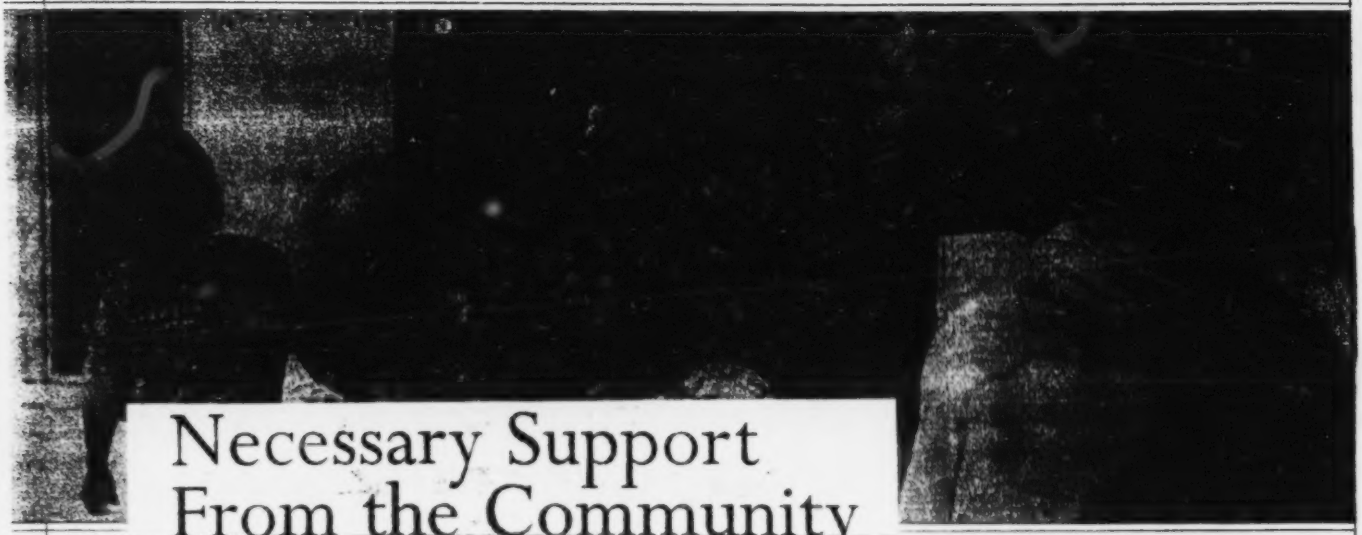

Necessary Support From the Community

What does it take to foster and sustain more of these community organizations where youth can find interesting things to do, security, and accomplishments that equip them for productive lives? These youth organizations we studied are unusual resources for kids—too many organized programs for youth look quite different in what they offer, how they interact with youth, and the kind of environment they construct. It's not surprising that the effectiveness of these organizations differs in important ways, too. Moreover, these differences in program histories and supports run counter to some conventional ways of funding and assessing youth organizations. In order to make community count for youth, communities need to rethink strategies for their youth-directed CBOs.

LEADERSHIP AND PASSION

Each of the programs we studied build from an individual's passion—a passion for kids, an activity, or a community's well-being. This is true even for local affiliates of national organizations such as the YMCA or Boys and Girls Clubs. Effective programs are led by adults deeply committed to young people and their futures.

These youth organizations are not established primarily for purposes of safety, providing youth someplace to go, or as a strategy for addressing an academic, health, or social problem. The enthusiasm of adults associated with the organization brings essential beginnings and elements of stability. In instances when we saw a vital youth organization evolve into the dull fare that youth reject, we saw a change of leadership. A leader motivated by passion and commitment was replaced with an individual who saw the position as a responsibility to manage rather than a mission to achieve.

The prominence of passion in effective youth organizations signals the need to identify and back that penchant and energy in the community. In addition to supporting established organizations, policies that effectively support youth organizations seek out and underwrite committed individuals and enable their work with young people. Policies in support of passion for youth get the word out that funds are available for adults in the community who have enthusiasm for working with young people.

Yet, most local policies encourage established institutions as carriers of public interest and investments in youth. This strategy may defeat the type of fundamental rethinking urged here. The risk for policy resides in new forms of accountability, untried relationships, and the loss of leverage that accompanies relations based in contracts with organizations. Communities need to back these possibly risky investments. Youth's unwillingness to get involved in the usual offerings bears witness to the low return on more conventional strategies.

COMMUNITY CONTEXTS

Guiding principles underlie effective youth organizations, but there are no cookie-cutter practices. The work of a high-quality youth organization is thoroughly local and therefore unique. Surface similarities among communities mask differences that matter to youth and the organizations that nurture them. Every community has similar institutions, but they are understood and

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operated in distinctive ways. Schools in urban areas, for instance, are sometimes seen as agents of the system and hostile to youth and their families. Schools in urban areas often are impersonal and disconnected from the community, since few if any of the professionals working inside them know much about the neighborhood or the people who live there. Rural schools, on the other hand, provide conspicuous contrast to these urban observations. Schools in rural areas often form the hub of the community. They gather all generations of community members, and school staff know not only the children and youth in their care but also their extended families. Although urban schools make a difficult and not always appropriate partner to youth-serving community organizations, rural schools are natural collaborators.

Moreover, within communities of similar descriptions, institutions may mean different things to residents. We found significant differences among urban communities, in particular, in youth's perceptions of the local school. Youth who rate their schools as hostile or unsupportive are less likely to stay there for after-school functions than are youth who find their schools a comfortable, safe environment. School may not be safe after school—largely due to the realities of street life rather than the school itself. Questions of where to locate after-school activities need to be answered by the community, not resolved by standardized policy directives. Program location can make a vital difference in youth's involvement.

Communities around the country also have different issues or shortcomings with which to contend. Urban areas find space for youth activities in short supply, while mid-sized towns and rural areas generally count space as an asset. Rural and many mid-sized towns struggle with inadequate libraries or other cultural resources, resources that most urban areas can build upon. Problems of inadequate transportation frustrate plans for youth activities in rural communities where youth live miles apart down country roads. Urban youth organizations confront not a lack of transportation but its cost and safety.

Therefore, most initiatives to build effective CBOs need to be based in local knowledge and conditions. Those hoping to replicate effective youth organizations nationwide must work within local contexts. These programs will not transfer intact from one location to another, nor can they be "taken to scale" by simply repeating what works in one community.

COMMUNITY "MENU"

If one were to judge youthful ideas about individuality merely from their choice of clothing, one might conclude that all young people want to be the same. The baggy pants, oversized T-shirts, and backward-turned hats seem a virtual uniform for American youth at the end of the twentieth century. Yet the choices and voices of the youth we came to know advise that individual preferences matter enormously. Youth's evolving sense of identity and competence call for programs suitable to them. The young woman who brightened her neighborhood's spirits with her cheerful murals would not likely join a local basketball team. The youth hard at work planting, tending, and selling their vegetables probably will not be attracted by membership in a drama troupe. The youth living on one side of "Death Wish Park" will not participate in activities with youth who live on the other side, even though the physical distance between them is only a few blocks. A necessary strength of the CBOs attractive to youth in a community is their variable offerings. Opportunities for youth of different tastes, talents, and peer affiliations make up a menu of learning from which youth can choose.

A surprise early in our research was the dearth of opportunities for young women. We found only a handful of programs for them. Public and philanthropic dollars often focus on the non-school hours of young men, especially African-American boys in the inner-cities who are thought to be most "at-risk" and most threatening to society's goals. In many coeducational settings, especially formerly boy-serving organizations gone coed, girls seem like afterthoughts as plans are made for equipment or activities. In too many club programs, for example, an afterschool activity for girls involves standing around watching the boys play pool rather that one constructed specifically for and by the young women. We found both an absolute level of underservice to girls overall in communities, and too many instances of girls being treated as second-class citizens in coeducational programs.

An effective youth organization must be able to attend to these differences and provide occasions for youth to engage as active learners. What one youth leader termed "herd programming"—taking in large numbers of youth—will not provide effective environments for learning and development. It is unfortunately the case that fiscal and other constraints in many communities apparently preclude support for the intentional learning environments we describe here. While these are well-meant efforts, and may be better than nothing for young people in depleted neighborhoods, communities must be clear that they cannot foster the youth outcomes we document here.

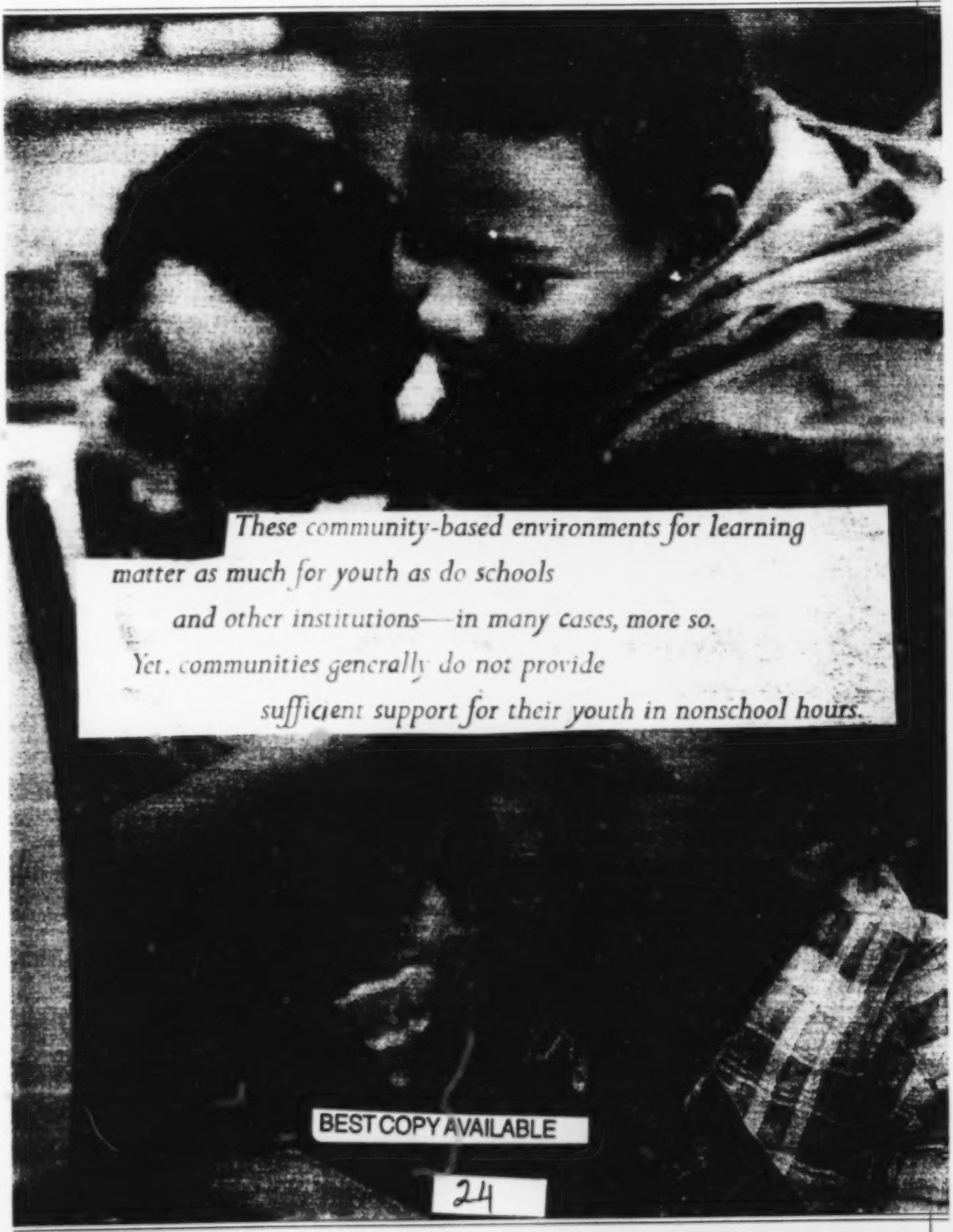
This prescription for varied programs and occasions for learning runs contrary to such policy virtues as cost-effectiveness. Funding and overseeing a few larger youth-based programs without question is a simpler task than supporting a variety of smaller ones. But the strength of the effort lies in its suitability from a youth perspective. Choice and attention to individual differences are key. A menu from which youth can choose also asks a community to address its diversity—to acknowledge the cultural and gender differences in interests that shape youth preferences and developmental needs.

DIVERSE EXPERTISE

What matters in the successful organizations we studied is a commitment to young people, to a community, and honest engagement with both. Adults having these qualifications sometimes have credentials of an obvious sort—as teachers, youth workers, social workers. But many—especially insiders with a passion for helping create better environments for youth than they grew up in—have no such credentials. Some lack a high school diploma. Yet, as one youth leader put it, these caring and competent staff have a "Ph.D. in the streets." Youth leaders in many organizations point to the critical knowledge these volunteers bring to the organization. Their experience lies not only in understanding families, but also in ways to get adults involved—how to engage seemingly unavailable community resources. A dilemma for policymakers and funders is how to "certify" these talented individuals in an era of credentialism and legitimate concerns about who works with youth. A lesson not to be overlooked among these accomplishments is the importance of moving beyond the domination of so-called experts, both in response to unique resources of other adults and to community doubts about outsiders' expertise. In urban areas especially, distrust of public institutions and their representatives runs deep. Community organizations have a vast resource of community members from which to draw if they don't limit themselves to so-called experts.

An additional challenge to developing expertise and extending the work of CBOs is the need to provide support for the many roles staff are playing in employment counseling, job-training, and business development. These adults need different kinds of training for these efforts to succeed consistently. One impediment is that many adults in these youth organizations have no professional identity. Structural shifts that affect institutions typically come from a constituency that has a nationally acknowledged role. Teachers, administrators, and parents can push for school reform. Welfare workers and the business community can speak to welfare-to-work issues. No such identifiable cadre of supporters currently represents youth organizations—neither the adults who work there, nor those who advocate on behalf of non-school learning environments. Adults who work in these organizations have no professional recognition beyond the doors of their organization. Adults who come into these organizations do so through their sense of potential in the youth and in the organization's mission. Established community stakeholders like local education funds can take the lead in providing training for adult volunteers. LEFs work daily with volunteers, parents, and community leaders. They have much to teach these fledgling groups about managing a CBO and its volunteers.

How then might the policy community and those institutions granted authority to credential rethink prerequisites and programs of study to include these young adults and adults who fall outside the conventional certified pathways? How might communities move beyond either/or discussions of the merits of lay or professional roles to embrace and legitimize the contributions of both? Here, too, LEFs are critical. Local education funds are currently working to change the face of professional development within schools across the nation. If the learning community is expanded beyond schools, the



These community-based environments for learning matter as much for youth as do schools and other institutions—in many cases, more so. Yet, communities generally do not provide sufficient support for their youth in nonschool hours.

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lessons LEFs have learned in assessing training programs for teachers are applicable to training programs for all adults involved in supporting increased youth learning.

LISTENING TO YOUTH

Youth learn quickly about the supports and constraints of their communities. Organizations often fail because they have incorrect information about the lives of the young people they serve. This lack of youth perspective leads adults to make wrong assumptions about such important things as "safe" streets, welcoming organizations, or possible partners. A lack of input from youth sometimes leads adults to wrong conclusions. For example, the well-intentioned adult mentor in an urban setting was furious when youth from the organization he sponsored failed to keep appointments he had arranged for them. What he didn't know, however, was that the young men did not know how to read or use the city's bus schedule to get downtown. An adult might view a youth's poor school performance or attendance as a sign of apathy, while youth might explain it differently—in terms of a violent school setting, indifferent teachers, or boring classes. Adults may explain teen pregnancies in terms of insufficient information about safe sex or lack of discipline. But the young women we talked to referred to "having someone to love." Or, one young woman living in a home for pregnant teens in the Midwest told us, "It's boring. What can you do? You can join a gang, use drugs, or have sex. We chose sex. It's free, and it's not dangerous." A youth-centered community listens to the nature of problems and about positive responses. As long as a community ignores the opinions of youth or sees itself as detached from them, opportunities for youth development are unlikely to change.

SUPPORT FOR CORE ACTIVITIES

Communities need to invest in resources to engage youth's free time and attention. These community-based environments for learning matter as much for youth as do schools and other institutions—in many cases, more so. Yet, communities generally do not provide sufficient support for their youth in nonschool hours. Research and experience tell us that many youth organizations run on sheer will, constantly scrambling for funding. They wrestle with broken pipes, crumbling floors, and inadequate space and supplies. Their adult leaders have to spend an inordinate amount of time searching for funding and thinking of new ways to make their tried and successful work match the latest "flavor of the month" requests from foundations or other grantmakers.

Moreover, much of the funding for youth organizations supports start-up activities, not ongoing operations. As a result, many youth organizations live from three-year grant to three-year grant, often directing significant staff resources away from work with youth to grant writing. Funding for growth and sustainability means funding the work these organizations currently do and extending the time frame within which funds may be used. It also means general funding for less glamorous, day-to-day duties such as background checks for staff, snacks for participants, and T-shirts and other symbols of membership so important to youth.

Funding for youth organizations often comes from multiple sources. One organization in our research, for example, received funds from over 100 separate sources. Paperwork multiplies accordingly and can strangle small organizations with scant time, resources, and expertise to manage it. The great majority of the effective youth organizations we profile here fit into that category—a grassroots group getting by on sheer will and persistence but with few administrative resources. Many of the agencies that fund CBOs have similar goals but separate applications, timelines, and requirements. Private foundations run grant programs appropriate for youth organizations through multiple program areas (e.g., youth development, community development, and education). Public funders similarly operate multiple funding streams out of different offices. A state department of education, for instance, might administer funds to youth organizations through service learning and community service initiatives, after-school programs, school-linked services, safety programs, or drug prevention programs. These uncoordinated good intentions turn into a morass of paperwork and confusing requirements for youth organizations. A more supportive system of funding for quality CBOs would work with the community to coordinate funding requirements, technical assistance, and schedules to minimize the time youth organizations spend

on administrative work and fundraising and maximize the time they spend working directly with youth. Burgeoning bureaucracies and compliance-based contracts are incompatible with the trusting relationships that matter for communities and their local organizations.

MAKE YOUTH A LINE ITEM

We asked leaders in vastly different communities about local priorities for youth. Responses to our question were consistent across region and community. Yes, youth are a priority for the community. But somehow there are always more pressing items, like police protection and road repairs, on the community agenda. Youth services frequently fall to fourth or fifth on a list of community priorities, but budgets accommodate only the top three. In local budget struggles, youth have ineffective voice and claim upon community resources. Implicit are assumptions that youth are the responsibility of schools and families, not of the entire community. Communities serious about making community count for youth will bolster supports for youth organizations. Communities serious about supporting youth in their non-school hours will make that support a line item in the local budget rather than one contender in annual budget battles. Local education funds are well-versed in analyzing budgets—and in educating the community on how to read budgets and request changes. Doing so doesn't necessarily require financial acumen. But it does require a desire to advocate for youth. Over the past decade of navigating local politics, local education funds have earned a reputation as an impartial advocate for youth and youth programs.

ESTABLISH MEANINGFUL MEASURES OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

Youth organizations, like other community agencies, are often held accountable for achieving outcomes that are specified by agents outside the community. These designated outcomes are frequently unrelated to what they do day-to-day. Or they call for indicators that make little sense in the context of an organization's program. The experiences of the effective youth organizations we studied offer a number of suggestions for more meaningful evaluation.

Effective organizational processes—as well as more locally defined youth outcomes—should be considered. Some organizations start in places with few guides or

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supports. Just opening their doors and getting youth involved marks a major accomplishment.

Meaningful measures acknowledge that many outcomes important for youth to achieve—confidence, agency, leadership, responsibility—are difficult to assess, especially in the short run. "Process is Product" in a quality youth organization. Meaningful measures gauge the environment for youth development—to what extent is it youth-centered? Knowledge-centered? Assessment-centered? Does the organization embody a respectful, affirming community of adults and youth?

Looking at espoused organization goals provides insufficient evaluation. Short-term projects cannot teach concentration, revision, and persistence. Programs that are merely "fun" cannot challenge youth to learn new things, imagine futures, or achieve goals. Moreover, we saw how programs that appeared the same on paper were in practice different opportunities. Accordingly, measures of these organization qualities and actual offerings are important indicators of their potential for enabling positive outcomes for youth. Yet these meaningful measures typically are not captured in grant applications and evaluations, especially those of the checklist variety. Evaluations that emphasize such items as participation rates or stated program objectives rather than students' experiences and their assessments of value cannot help funders or staff members identify strengths or areas for improvement.

Youth leaders consistently point to problems of "fit" between what funders ask them to count as outcomes and the goals they aim to achieve. Many of the outcomes for which youth organizations are held accountable can take a significant amount of time and effort to change. Some CBOs are asked about the impact they have on school grades when they might be more accurately judged by their progress along interim measures such as development of leadership skills, emotional competencies, and attitudes of responsibility.

Outcomes might not capture success because they tend to be static rather than developmental in terms of the organization. When a youth organization first opens its doors, it might be forced to provide a range of unforeseen services in an effort to be accessible and relevant to its neighborhoods. When youth organizations first start

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to work with youth, some outcomes might show initial gains then level off and/or decline as more difficult challenges rise to the surface.

Adults working with community-based organizations particularly resent the negative frame of many required evaluations. Some youth organizations are asked to track deficits in youth (for example, reductions in incidence of vandalism, school failure or poor attendance, or teen pregnancies) rather than note and appraise the positive youth accomplishments. Many, if not most evaluation or accountability structures, are based in a "pathology reduction" frame rather than one of positive youth development, in direct contradiction to the character essential to an effective youth organization. Youth leaders in the effective organizations we studied agree that "problem-free does not mean fully prepared. Young people are sold short when sights are set so low. Adults must state positively what their goals are for young people."[6]

As a consequence of these ill-fitting evaluations, some CBOs feel pressure to change course in order to satisfy funders: to provide more direct academic time or to focus on reduction of high-risk behaviors, even if those are contrary to the "best practices" of effective CBOs.

GROWING YOUTH-BASED RESOURCES

The community organizations we studied are exceptional and generally not part of any self-conscious association of resources for youth. The majority of the effective organizations we came to know were "home grown" and isolated elements in an uncoordinated voluntary, youth-based non-school sector. But these organizations need not be exceptional and rare, and dependent on the presence of an exceptional leader. Evidence exists around the country that effective youth-based organizations can be built by engaging community members and staff in vision-building activities for youth development, connecting them to "best practices," inviting genuine youth participation in assessing needs, designing programs, and evaluating their contributions.[7] Public policymakers and private funders can realize significant benefits for youth and their communities though investments in capacity-building efforts and organizations. These investments might underwrite networks for youth organizations and youth workers, organizations dedicated to sharing ideas and strategies, assistance with evaluation and program design, or occasions for youth to work with community members on issues of constructing and connecting community supports for youth. Adults working in youth-based organizations express a sense of disconnection and "going it alone" that could be ameliorated by resources dedicated to connection and shared goals. These individuals, like the youth they work with, need an intentional learning environment—one that is centered on their needs, focuses on their learning, and provides opportunities for invention, reflection, and feedback.

COMMUNITY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Youth development means community development. A community bereft of adults who care about and provide activities for youth can provide only rocky and inadequate support for youth development and healthy learning environments.

Seeing youth development as community development refocuses policy and practice beyond the specifics of opportunities provided for youth to the community relationships that nurture and sustain those opportunities. In many of the community-service programs we came to know, for example, the relationships among adults engaged in the program continued beyond the specific activity to benefit them and youth. Some of these benefits to adults are direct, as in the church-based literacy program that hires local residents as receptionists, aides, or general supervisors for after-school programs. Many organizations involve community members as volunteers. In more than one instance this volunteer work and the evidence of reliability and talent it establishes gives adults the confidence to seek paid jobs. These extended relationships fostered in many CBOs illustrate the "strength of weak ties"—the ways in which social networks can contribute to personal success and well-being. These ties are community development at its core, and they make up an essential web of mutual accountability and responsibility for young people.

Understanding youth development in terms of community development raises new challenges for policy. One challenge is building on community assets—strengthening those features of community that already contribute to the well-being of youth and families.

Strength-based strategies aim to honor and extend community strengths, so that they can be sustained and stable after the life of the grant—too often the case when initiatives are intended only to repair or respond to community deficits.[8]

As sensible as a strategy that starts from community strengths might sound, it can pose challenges to funders and policy makers. In many communities, important assets sit in faith-based institutions, institutions precluded from public support by First Amendment guarantees of separation of church and state. Moreover, in many communities, norms resist spending public dollars on organizations or activities with any ideological stance. Yet faith-based organizations are often among the most available and sustaining resources for a community's youth and adults. Economic pressures and a growing sense of urgency are bringing churches and schools together in pursuing a common goal of nurturing healthy children. Not only are religious organizations regularly the heart and center of communities, they often furnish the only coherent system of positive values in the distressed contexts of poor neighborhoods. Navigating the legal and normative terrain that separates public support from faith-based organizations poses a hurdle for communities aiming to build on their assets.

One particularly ironic challenge to strategies for youth development lies in the call to see youth as resources. The typical "youth as problem" stance of policy has been identified as a dead-end strategy, yet alternatives have proven difficult to support. The idea of youth as a constructive agent rather than a "target" often discomfits officials and others worried about losing control. Yet the experiences we relate here make evident that youth are resources to their peers and to their community—and effective community organizations intentionally cast them as such. The successful outcomes we detail are based on a deep and articulated faith in the capacity of young people to be resources for the community and energetic agents in their own positive futures. Advice to fundamentally rethink the value and roles of youth may be difficult to sell, however, especially in violence-plagued urban areas.

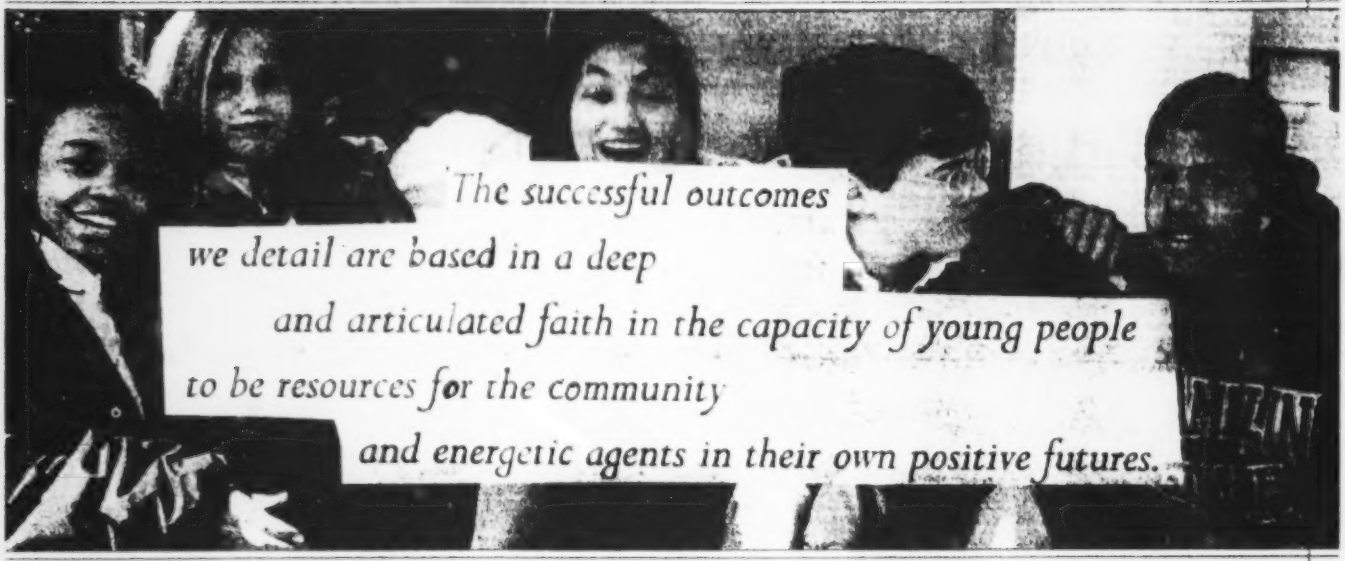
Still other barriers exist to approaching youth development as community development as a matter of policy and support. Youth-based community development must engage all of the institutions through which youth move if a vital context for their growth is to be constructed. Yet, schools, the so-called "universal institution" for children and youth, typically are left out of both community and youth development efforts.

This omission sometimes is by design and sometimes by default. In most urban communities, and in many mid-sized towns and rural areas, schools and communities have grown apart. In urban areas, schools and communities often operate in a climate of mutual mistrust rather than one of collaboration. In rural areas, policies that have consolidated smaller schools into larger regional high schools have fractured the spirit of place many schools held for their communities.

Positive school-community connections are unusual, and as one youth advocate put it "there is an abundance of arrogance and ignorance on both sides." Adults working with youth organizations frequently believe that school people do not respect or value their young people. Educators, for their part, generally see youth organizations as mere "fun" and as having little to contribute to the business of schools. Moreover, educators often establish professional boundaries around learning and teaching, considering them the sole purview of teachers. Yet adults working in community organizations know that youth have many teachers and that learning does continue in non-school hours.

In many ways, both are right. We heard many accounts from adults working in youth organizations about the damage done in school to the young people they cared for. "I need to spend two hours after school making up for what happens to my kids in school," said one. "They are made to feel they're no good and can't accomplish anything." Educators, commenting on youth organizations, say that many of the activities available to young people in their non-schools hours are insubstantial, lacking in opportunities for learning.

Yet fostering more creative efforts of cooperation between schools and youth organizations is critical. Few of the groups we studied could entertain this idea, however, for when they had done so, they ran into bureaucratic snags. In one urban community, school regulation precluded cooperating artists from using the spaces they needed. Barred from the gym or hardwood floored hallways because of insurance provisions, the dance program struggled on a concrete lunchroom floor. Provided no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assistance from the school's janitors, a mural artist desperately mopped up after her young artists so teachers would not return to floors marked with finger paints, sticky paper, or other evidence of youthful creation. By the artists' reports, school officials were deaf to requests to talk about ways the after-school program and the school could collaborate in the interest of youth.

The waste of precious resources deprives youth of valuable opportunities to learn, practice, and achieve. Schools are repositories of spaces and materials to support learning. Communities, on the other hand, offer fertile resources that can extend the classroom into the non-school lives of youth. More effective school-community connections must resolve these turf battles. Creative efforts also require grounding in expanded notions of teaching and learning opportunities. These new understandings await conversations among educators and community members, discussions that cannot even begin without suspension of their mutually held arrogance and ignorance. Communities need to attack this culture of distrust and bring schools to the table. The challenge for schools is to think about what happens outside the classroom and consider resources for teaching and learning in the community. The challenge for communities is to think about ways they can support what happens in the classroom in nonschool hours.

In addition to these largely horizontal relationships among community institutions and their youth, effective community organizations also must depend on vertical relationships to support their goals—that is, relationships between activities at the neighborhood level and those at the city level. Opportunities for youth are shaped—for better or worse—by larger political and regulatory contexts. We encountered many examples, generally negative, of how youth organizations are affected by their settings. In one urban area, for example, youth were disappointed and finally angered by the failure of the city to fulfill its promise of resources for their community-service project. Their anger was over more than just scuttled plans. It expressed their reinforced belief that the system had no respect for poor, African-American youth. They believed that "the suits" did not honor their pledge and could not be trusted. Belief in adults, constructed within the nurturing environment of the organization "family," is easily eroded by mixed signals and broken promises.

Individuals and organizations with compelling public voice will have to become convinced of the need for, and the effectiveness of, these youth-based organizations and their potential for creating positive climates for young people. Those interested in education, civic responsibility, and creative approaches to working with youth will have to step forward to acknowledge youth-based organizations and the youth they embrace as powerful, positive allies in community development.

Effective community youth organizations such as those featured here go a long way to answer the conceptual challenge of how to make community count for youth. A more difficult challenge is a political one: how to mobilize advocates with diverse perspectives into more productive relationships around youth development and opportunities for young people.

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Recommendations for Community, Youth Organizations, Schools, Funders, and Policymakers

How can communities count for youth development?' Support for effective youth organizations will require a coordinated effort across sectors and interests. City councils need to get involved. Schools need to act, as do diverse community groups, funders, and youth. The following is an attempt to translate the previous arguments and findings into action steps. The long-term strategies indicate the support youth organizations need to make community count for youth. The short-term strategies suggest beginnings.

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MEANINGFUL MEASURES OF YOUTH OUTCOMES

	LONG TERM	SHORT TERM
COMMUNITY	› Develop local capacity to assess the needs of youth on a regular basis. › Develop a local database of resources for youth development and concrete evidence of consequences for youth competencies and attitudes. › Make information on youth needs and community resources for their development a central element of deliberations on budgets and policies affecting youth.	› Involve youth and community in identifying, documenting, and assessing opportunities for youth and supports for youth development.
YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS	› Document and share what you do specifically as it relates to learning outcomes. This does not only mean expanding the academic supports you provide, but studying and understanding how the work you already do with youth contributes to their performance in school.	› Document your successes with youth in terms that are meaningful to you as well as funders, schools, and other potential collaborative partners. › Conduct an inventory of opportunities to record work with youth as part of the regular day-to-day operation of the organization.
SCHOOLS	› Include the role of youth organizations in your assessments of what contributes to the performance of certain youth in school. › Recognize/reward youth for their participation in youth organizations. For example, consider awarding community service credit for community service performed through youth organizations.	› Help youth organizations access the public information you have on the school performance of the youth with which they work. This will help them document outcomes for the youth they serve.
FUNDERS AND POLICYMAKERS	› In evaluations and other reporting requirements for youth organizations that you fund, give credit for process as well as outcomes. Ensure the outcomes that you measure are meaningful measures of the performance of youth organizations, and ask for strengths-based outcomes. › Establish channels for ongoing dialogue with your youth organizations and other grantees about what outcomes you should reasonably expect a youth organization to achieve after certain periods of time.	› Fund the development of evaluations and evaluators who can work in youth organizations. › Help grantees negotiate evaluations and outcome measures that are perceived to be useful to the organization. › Conduct an inventory of data already available at youth organizations and other organizations that serve your neighborhood youth. Consider these sources of available information first when choosing evaluation and reporting requirements. › Support collaboration between communities and universities to develop local capacity to document and assess youth needs and the outcomes of CBOs.

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SMARTER FUNDING AND POLICY STRATEGIES

	LONG TERM	SHORT TERM
COMMUNITY	› Offer a diverse "menu" of organizations and programs for youth. › Provide a web of reinforcing supports for youth that includes all the institutions that affect youth development. › Develop a local action-base for youth. › Make youth a line item in the community budget.	› Identify assets for youth within the community in terms of caring adults, spaces for programs, and expertise that can assist youth organizations.
YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS	› Develop environments that are youth, knowledge, and assessment-centered. › Establish systems within the organization to document and share promising work. Important documentation includes day-to-day practices, outcomes for youth, and actual program budgets.	› Access resources needed to provide high-quality programming. This may include formal professional training, visits to other youth organizations, and joining professional associations. › Familiarize funders and schools with the organization's work. Invite them to open houses, tours, and performances by youth. › Conduct an internal assessment of points in the day-to-day operation of the organization where work with youth can and should be documented. › Expand board membership to include youth, school principals, school district personnel, foundation program officers, and representatives of city/county government. › Begin to establish relationships with the schools your youth attend and other eligible recipients of state and federal after-school funds.
SCHOOLS	› Include youth organizations as integral parts of strategies to improve learning. › Provide incentives for teachers to learn about their students' work in youth organizations. For example, support professional development time and stipends or credits to visit youth organizations and other non-school settings where youth learn. › Develop curricula that integrates community resources for learning and teaching.	› Include youth organizations and other community organizations in assessments of resources for learning. › Establish a dialogue with youth organizations in the neighborhood. › Participate in community meetings. › See schools as providers of last resort for after-school programming. › Encourage students to share their work in youth organizations during the school day. Publicize the work of students in youth organizations. Consider devoting a regular portion of your newsletter and school bulletin boards to news of local youth organizations. › Offer space to youth organizations for performances, art shows, sports, and other activities.

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SMARTER FUNDING AND POLICY STRATEGIES

	LONG TERM	SHORT TERM
FUNDERS AND POLICYMAKERS	› Fund people, not just programs. This may mean restructuring funding streams around fellowships for youth workers and directors, and/or making funding more discretionary. › Fund intra- and inter-city networks of youth workers and youth organizations. › Support development of alternative pathways of training and credentialling for youth workers. › Reframe policy debates around after-school programming. This may include making community-based organizations eligible for federal and state after-school dollars typically reserved for schools. › Ensure that community-based organizations are aware of and applying for available after-school funds. › Fund ongoing operations, not just start-up costs. This may involve educating youth organizations and other CBOs about how they can access existing funding streams in education and other areas. › Work with funders of similar programs to streamline or otherwise coordinate grant application procedures and eligibility requirments. Pursue the feasibility and usefulness to applicants of releasing joint requests for funding. › Create a local education fund to advocate for school and community improvements at the public policy level.	› Make a pool of private funds available as grants or loans to draw down public funding. › Learn about youth organizations in the community/jurisdiction. Participate in community meetings. › Identify intermediary organizations and other potential convenors of youth workers. › Set broad goals for after-school programs and policies. For example, be flexible on the number of youth served, hours of operation, and type of activities provided. The main criterion for funding should be that applicants demonstrate that their approach to after-school programming matches the needs, resources, and contexts of the youth they intend to serve. › In grant applications, ask youth organizations and their partners to conduct an assessment of their community needs and strengths related to these goals. Ask the youth organizations, schools, and other community agencies how they will build on these strengths and address some of these challenges. › Make planning grants or other funds available to schools and youth organizations to conduct community assessments. › Actively collect information on what youth organizations do to support learning. › Put representatives of youth organizations on your advisory boards for your programs in education, as well as community development and youth development. › Research and make connections to other grantmakers and policymakers with similar goals and applicants.

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Community Counts draws upon work supported by grants from the Spencer Foundation to Milbrey McLaughlin and Shirley Brice Heath from 1987-1999. Shirley Heath has been my close colleague and collaborator ever since we first discovered our shared interest in the role of youth-based organizations. Her commitment to understanding their contributions suffuses every page of this report. ❙ The body of our research has been shaped and informed by many talented individuals over the years. Merita Irby and Juliet Langman were our original site workers, and immersed themselves in our three urban sites in the first half of our research. Their work was aided by a crew of "junior ethnographers," youth who participated in the organizations we studied. Chad, Dinesha, Felicia, Izzy, Johnny, Manuel, Marvin, and Peggy played an especially central role both as research collaborators and by planning a conference for youth. As our sites expanded, so did the research team that made this far-flung research possible. It included (in chronological order of involvement with the project) Steve Balt, Jennifer Massen Wolf, Shelby Anne Wolf, Ali Callicoatte, Melissa Groo, Kim Bailey, Arnetha Ball, Brita Lomdardi, Mailee Ferguson, Sara DeWitt, Shama Blaney, Monica Lam, Adelma Roach, Emma Leuvano, Joe Kahne, Ann Davidson, and Adriel Harvey. A substudy that focused on one urban neighborhood was directed by Joe Kahne and involved James O'Brien, Theresa Quinn, and Andrea Brown. The "boxed" vignettes used in this report are drawn from their observation notes and writing. Greg Darnieder and the Steans Family Foundation provided direction and support for that substudy. Rebecca Barr at the Spencer Foundation was encouraging and supportive through it all. Julie Cummer, our Stanford University Project Administrator, was a brilliant strategist in figuring out ways to take often-bizarre requests for reimbursement through the university system and helping in so many ways to keep our "distributed project" together. ❙ Other individuals made contributions specific to this report. Haggai Kupermintz and Ken Ikeda provided assistance with statistical analyses of the survey data. Meredith Honig contributed ideas and text to the section on recommendations. Michele Cahill, Sarah Deschenes, Meredith Honig, Della Hughes, Ken Ikeda, Peter Kleinbard, Morva McDonald, Jane Quinn, and Sylvia Yee read drafts of this report and it is stronger for their comment. ❙ None of this work would have been possible without the cooperation, trust, and openness of the youth and adults who invited us into their lives and organizations over the years. Their generosity, deep belief in youth and community, and commitment to a civil society are impossible to capture in words. ❙ The partnership of Wendy Puriefoy and the board and staff of the Public Education Network in preparing, publishing, and disseminating this report is gratefully acknowledged.

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NOTES

1. For example, see L. Scott Miller (1995), An American Imperative: Accelerating Minority Education Advancement. New Haven: Yale University Press.

2. The research reported here was supported by the Spencer Foundation in grants to Shirley Brice Heath and Milbrey W. McLaughlin, from 1987 through 1999.

3. The precise numbers of youth who participated in some way in our research over the past decade are difficult to calculate. We estimate that the youth who participated in the more than 120 specific projects or activities we studied number more than 1000. Many of these activities, however, were associated with a larger organization. For example, we spent a great deal of time with about six young men associated with a gang prevention project, sponsored by the YMCA. A city mural project team of about 10 young artists was part of a Boys and Girls Club. A tally of the youth who nominally belong to all of the sponsoring organizations included in this research sums to around 30,000 based on membership figures provided to us. However, all youth members affiliated with these organizations were not part of this research. This report is based on the experiences of this smaller subset of youth.

4. Data that enable us to compare the attitudes, behaviors and outcomes of youth participating in community based organizations with those of American youth generally are based on responses to National Educational Longitudinal Survey questionnaires. The National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS:88) is a longitudinal study of 8th graders whom the National Center for Educational Statistics followed from 1988 through 1994. The design of NELS:88 permits examination of the role of schools, teachers, community, and family in promoting positive outcomes. The NELS:88 sample is constructed to be representative of American youth generally. We administered a questionnaire containing a subset of NELS:88 items to youth involved in the community based organizations we studied (N=364). We then compared the responses from these youth with those from youth participating in the 1992 NELS:88 Second Follow Up (N=21,188). These comparisons allow us to make statements about the circumstances, attitudes and outcomes of youth involved in this research compared to "typical" American youth.

5. Figure 1 shows data from a second project specific survey of approximately 175 youth in a particular inner-city neighborhood.

6. Karen Pittman (1992), Defining the Fourth R: Promoting Youth Development Through Building Relationships. Commissioned Paper #5. Center for Youth Development, Academy for Educational Development: Washington, D.C.

7. Michele Cahill offers as an example the experiences of the Networks for Youth Development.

8. John Kretzman and John McKnight (1993) popularized the term "assets based strategies" and ideas about "assets mapping." (Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets. Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.)

9. Meredith Honig provided [illegible] to this section.

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